THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
BENGALURU • SATURDAY • MARCH 18, 2023 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 20 • LATE CITY EDITION

PAK COURT GRANTS BAIL TO IMRAN KHAN

In a relief to embattled Imran Khan, a top Pakistani court granted protective bail to the former PM on Friday in eight terrorism cases and a civil case after he appeared before it, hours after another court suspended non-bailable arrest warrants against him till March 18 in a corruption case. Khan, the 70-year-old chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, travelled to the Lahore High Court in a bulletproof vehicle to seek protective bail.

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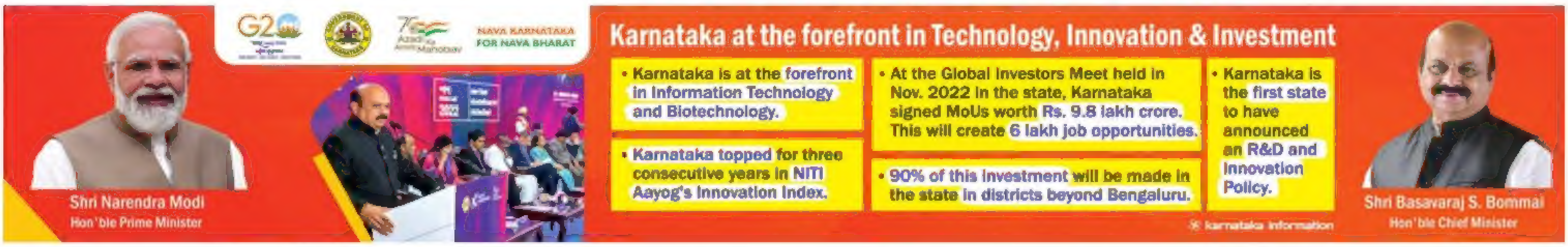
NAVA KARNATAKA FOR NAVA BHARAT
Karnataka at the forefront in Technology, Innovation & Investment
• Karnataka is at the forefront in Information Technology and Biotechnology.
• Karnataka topped for three consecutive years in NITI Aayog's Innovation Index.
• At the Global Investors Meet held in Nov. 2022 in the state, Karnataka signed MoUs worth Rs. 9.8 lakh crore. This will create 6 lakh job opportunities.
• 90% of this investment will be made in the state in districts beyond Bengaluru.
• Karnataka is the first state to have announced an R&D and Innovation Policy.
Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister
Shri Basavaraj S. Bommai
Hon'ble Chief Minister
karnataka information

Trinamool Congress head and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who called on her in Kolkata on Friday | PTI

Oppn forms G-8, calls Congress for LS poll talks

Wants freeze on the leadership issue till the 2024 elections are over

SHAHID FARIDI @ New Delhi

SEVEN non-Congress opposition chief ministers and a deputy CM have together formed a group and had three video conferences over the last few weeks to discuss a united fight against the BJP in 2024.

The eight leaders of this group include seven chief ministers – Mamata Banerjee (West Bengal), M K Stalin (Tamil Nadu), Nitish Kumar (Bihar), K Chandrashekar Rao (Telangana), Hemant Soren (Jharkhand), Bhagwant Mann (Punjab), Arvind Kejriwal (Delhi) – and Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav. The Congress is part of the ruling alliance in TN, Jharkhand and Bihar.

Sources said the group, called G-8, has invited the Congress to start seat-sharing talks on the condition that the leadership of the united opposition group is left open until after the Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress is yet to respond to the proposal. But sources said Rahul Gandhi is keen to engage with G-8 leaders. They said a united challenge to the BJP with all opposition parties coming on one platform was the plan Rahul Gandhi had referred to in London recently.

Some of the group's leaders like KCR, Kejriwal and Mamata oppose breaking bread with the Congress. It is on their insistence that the condition to freeze the leadership issue until after the elections was conveyed to the Congress.

Two other chief ministers – Naveen Patnaik (Odisha) and Jagan Mohan Reddy (Andhra Pradesh) – have refused to have any pre-poll understanding with the Congress.

Sources said if the Congress does not agree to their condition on leadership, they would go ahead and expand the group by including the remaining opposition CMs and other opposition parties.

According to sources, Mamata Banerjee's meeting with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday was an attempt by the non-Congress opposition leaders to send a message to the grand old party not to insist on a leadership position in the opposition.

> **We will go our own way, maintain distance from the Congress and BJP. We are not talking about forming a third front at the moment**
>
> Sudip Bandyopadhyay, TMC MP

The opposition leaders had not taken kindly to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's remark at an election rally that his party would lead the opposition and form the next government by ousting the BJP.

An opposition leader who is privy to the discussions among the G-8 said that the Congress had failed to take on the BJP in the last two Lok Sabha elections. "It was routed in states where it was in a direct fight with the BJP."

It is time the Congress allowed the regional parties that have successfully halted the BJP's march in their respective states to take the leadership position, he said.

ICC ARREST WARRANT AGAINST PUTIN

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

IN a rare move, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague on Friday issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin, holding him responsible for the alleged war crimes in Ukraine.

Accusing Putin of forced transfer of children from Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, the ICC also issued an arrest warrant against Russia's Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for her "individual criminal responsibility" for the crimes.

The ICC's action does not mean Putin will be extradited as the court doesn't have the power to arrest suspects; it can only exercise jurisdiction within countries that are signatories to the Rome Statute, the agreement that set up ICC. Russia is not a signatory. However, technically, Putin can be arrested if he travels to ICC member states.

The ICC said the arrest warrants are intended to be secret in order to protect victims and witnesses, but in this case it was making them public to prevent any further abductions of children in future.

The court's president, Piotr Hofmanski, said in a video statement that while the ICC's judges have issued the warrants, it will be up to the international community to enforce them. "The ICC is doing its part of work as a court of law," he said, adding: "The judges issued arrest warrants. The execution depends on international cooperation."

ICC has no police force of its own to enforce warrants.

Ukraine welcomed ICC's move but Russia termed it 'meaningless'. Ukraine is not a member of the court, but it has granted the ICC jurisdiction over its territory.

Moscow has repeatedly denied accusations that its forces have committed atrocities during Russia's invasion of its neighbour.

Putin is the third serving president to have been issued an ICC arrest warrant. In the past, Sudan's Omar al-Bashir and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi were issued warrants. P12

WAR OF WORDS

BJP-Cong fight gets shriller

PREETHA NAIR @NewDelhi

THE war of words between the BJP and the Congress got shriller on Friday with their respective party heads sparring in the context of Rahul Gandhi's 'democracy under siege' statement in London recently.

In Parliament, too, the Congress retaliated against a BJP member's demand to set up a special panel to probe Rahul's remarks and consider his expulsion, by moving a privilege motion against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his alleged derogatory remarks against party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

The Congress also criticised the alleged 'muting' of Parliament's proceedings after the day's session began. Both Houses were adjourned after ruckus for the fifth consecutive day.

CONTINUED ON: P9

CAMPAIGN BLITZ

Himanta: No need for madrasas, will shut all in Assam

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

ASSAM Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma categorically stated here on Friday that there is no need for madrasas in society and instead, colleges and universities should be built to churn out doctors, engineers and other professionals for nation-building.

Sarma, campaigning in Karnataka for BJP ahead of the Assembly elections, was speaking after inaugurating an exhibition, "Shivacharitra", depicting the life and achievements of Chhatrapati Shivaji, at Shivaji Garden in Belagavi.

He said all madrasas in Assam will be closed soon, and already 600 such religious institutions have been shuttered.

He alleged that "atrocities" were committed during the Mughal rule and Congress is continuing with the same legacy. "The Grand Old party will not succeed in its efforts. Indian culture and heritage will continue to thrive," he added.

Sarma said, "Mughals wanted to weaken the country by destroying the Sanatan Hindu culture and Congress today has a similar agenda. Mughal rulers of Delhi destroyed the country's places of worship. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is helping people finally realise their dreams of having a Ram temple in Ayodhya and Kashi Vishwanath corridor."

Stating that Congressmen only spoke about Babri Mosque, he said, "People should teach them a lesson in the coming elections. There is a need to root out Congress and make Modi more powerful."

He said historians only glorified Mughal rulers, but never spoke about the life and achievements of Shivaji. "Chhatrapati Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh and Swami Vivekananda are our heroes. We need to rewrite Indian history. Shivaji had successfully stopped the advance of Mughals towards Deccan," he added.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma addresses a gathering in Belagavi on Friday | EXPRESS

EXPRESS READ

Lokayukta cops seek Madal Virupakshappa's custody

BENGALURU: The Karnataka Lokayukta police on Friday argued before the Karnataka High Court that Channagiri BJP MLA and former chairman of the Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Ltd K Madal Virupakshappa is required for custodial interrogation as he is not cooperating with the investigation | P4

NIA books two engineers in Shivamogga conspiracy case

BENGALURU: The NIA chargesheeted two B.Tech graduates in last year's Shivamogga IS conspiracy case. "B.Tech graduates Maaz Muneer Ahmed (23) and Syed Yasin (22) were radicalised and motivated by an online foreign-based handler... and were paid in cryptocurrency to target public and private properties," NIA stated | P5

STATUE

BJP TRIES TO ATTRACT MASSES AHEAD OF POLLS

The Basavaraj Bommai-led government is on a statue unveiling spree. In the past few months, the CM has unveiled at least 15 statues in various districts. P4

Compromised safety led to piped gas mishap

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

SUPPLY of piped gas to homes for cooking in the absence of strict adherence to standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure safety has made houses vulnerable to fire accidents.

The Thursday gas leak in HSR Layout, which injured two women, is an incident that has opened the eyes to this vulnerability — especially when cracks in the pipes are sealed without proper protocols being followed, as has been revealed to be the cause of this fire accident.

Although Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) has filed a complaint against Bangalore Water Supply & Sewerage Board (BWSSB) engineers over the incident, the latter said it will be asking GAIL for a list of locations where gas pipelines are passing through BWSSB manholes.

While GAIL has blamed BWSSB for not following SOPs, BWSSB officials said it was the first time such an incident had come to light wherein a gas pipeline passed through a manhole. Officials in the Infrastructure Development Department (IDD) and Urban Development Department (UDD) have said this raised concerns about the SOPs to be followed. "Using piped natural gas is the future and the government is working on this. But such incidents do raise safety concerns. It is thus important that not just the citizens, but also the agencies and the contractors follow due safety procedures listed out," said a UDD official. CONTINUED ON: P3

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